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ABSTRACT

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) uses a three-tiered approach to help other nations solve development problems. At the broadest level, the TVA is an educator, because it shares with others the benefits of what it has learned over the last 55 years. At the second level, the TVA is a regional planning consultant, and at the third level, the TVA is a purveyor of technology. As an educator, the TVA was begun as a model to show the rest of the nation how a region could lift itself out of the depths of the Depression. Every year, thousands of foreign visitors come to the TVA to learn; and to help the education of these visitors, the TVA has developed a series of courses entitled Integrated Regional Resources Management (IRRM). The IRRM is at the heart of the TVA's second-tier role as regional planner. the TVA's staff helps people to understand their country's or region's problems and to formulate solutions. Technology transfer, the third tier, allows the TVA to help people find answers that are appropriate to their needs. Education, development, and technology transfer is an ongoing part of the TVA mission. (SM)

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THE TVA IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

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THE TVA IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

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THE SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE
ON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES
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One of the vanities of the human species is curiosity about how others see us. Often we are casting about for compliments. More rarely, we seek understanding. Sometimes we are just curious to find out.

One thing we can count on, however--almost never will we find that others see us the way we see ourselves. Certainly, as a TVA employee I found that the views of TVA presented by my co-panelists, David Blank and Steven Neuse, are refreshingly original and give us who work at TVA something to ponder.

David Blank has given us an historical glimpse of TVA's ventures into Latin America. He's jogged my memory of names whose faces I never knew. And he's broadened my understanding of TVA's importance outside the Valley.

Steven Neuse, on the other hand, has painted a portrait of another man I never knew personally--David Lilienthal. David Lilienthal, as you might have guessed, is one of those larger-than-life figures to those of us who work for TVA.

Career employees at TVA share a corporate memory of him as a heroic figure who slew the dragons in the Valley, then carried his crusade to the developing nations of the world.

Steven has burst my bubble. Not that Steven's Lilienthal is a Don Quixote, mind you, but he's no St. George either. Steven tells us that Lilienthal was an elitist. That much of his grassroots philosophy was rhetoric.

And, worst of all, he tells us that Lilienthal failed--not once, but often. In the TVA corporate memory, Lilienthal never failed. Maybe Steven's right. Certainly, his portrait is more realistic than mine. And more endearing, too, because it's more human.

So, even if Lilienthal wasn't the best practitioner of his grassroots philosophy, TVA still reveres him for the accomplishments he achieved . . . and the ones he inspired. Because today TVA <u>is</u> putting that grassroots philosophy into practice, both at home and abroad.

TVA today uses a three-tiered approach to help other nations solve development problems. At the broadest level TVA is an educator. It shares with others the benefits of what it has learned over the last 55 years.

At the next level TVA is a regional planning consultant. It helps others develop their resources according to their capabilities.

At the third level TVA is a purveyor of technology. It shows others how to deal with a particular problem using the most appropriate technology at hand.

Let's first consider TVA's role as educator. TVA is and always has been a demonstration agency. TVA started life in the early thirties as an experiment--a demonstration to show the rest of the Nation how a region could lift itself out of the depths of depression.

Senator Norris, who was the father of TVA, and President Roosevelt, too, saw TVA as an experiment. They hoped that TVA would be only the first of many regional development agencies throughout the country.

Ironically, foreign visitors historically have understood better than our own citizenry that TVA is a demonstration.

Recently, a TVA employee, on returning from a trip to Paraguay, remarked that the Paraguayans treated him and his fellow TVA traveler as if they were gods. Being from TVA was deification enough. Rest assured, no one in the United States would give a TVA employee such treatment.

Every year thousands of foreign visitors come to TVA to learn. Primarily, these visitors are looking for ideas to apply in their homelands.

Sometimes they are looking for the big story--How did TVA harness a river and lift a depressed region into the forefront of the 20th century?

Sometimes they come with specific questions in mind . . . How can they most effectively process their lignite supply for energy? Or restore nutrients to impoverished soils? Over the years, TVA generally has dealt with these visitors on an ad hoc basis.

Recently, however, TVA designed a series of courses for such visitors. Called Integrated Regional Resources Management, or IRRM for short, the courses are tailored to run from a few days to four or more weeks, depending on the visitors' needs.

Ideally, a course is taught to individuals from a single country who are working on a specific regional development project. With a project of their own under way, they can better understand the problems TVA had to deal with. And, too, they can focus on their own problems and get TVA to help them find solutions.

TVA taught its first IRRM course in 1985 to a delegation of engineers and government workers from China. All of the Chinese were involved in a multi-dam project to harness the Hongshui River. A Chinese delegation had come to the United States a couple of years earlier to visit TVA, and TVA had sent a delegation to China to take a look at the Hongshui project.

The TVA delegation discovered that the Chinese were superb at marshaling 30,000 people to build a single dam, but the Chinese did not understand the impact a dam would have on the total regional development picture.

For example, although one dam had been built for nearly a decade, the reservoir was only half full. Families that had lived in the valley for perhaps a thousand years weren't about to leave.

The government had failed to consider the problems of relocation early on, and had yet to come up with an adequate relocation plan. And, contrary to popular belief, the government was not in a position to simply order people to pick up their stuff and move.

The TVA delegation also discovered that the existing reservoirs were filling up with silt at an incredible rate. The ravages of grazing and cutting trees for firewood left too little vegetation to hold the soil to the hillsides.

Erosion was so great that some of the dams--which were only a few years old--had little storage life left. To paraphrase an old east Tennessee saying, the reservoirs were too thick to drink and too wet to plow.

Problems such as these led TVA to offer the IRRM program to the Chinese. What TVA had to offer the Chinese was not how to build a dam--the Chinese were masters at that. Rather TVA could show them how their land and water and people and culture were inextricably bound together. Once the Chinese understood this seamless web, they could use the Hongshui project to strengthen the web rather than rip it apart.

This year TVA will teach the IRRM course to two Latin American groups--the Tropical Agricultural Research and Training Center of Costa Rica, and Electrobras, which is the national utility of Brazil.

The integrated resources management philosophy runs through all of TVA's international efforts. It is clearly at the heart of TVA's second-tier role as regional planner.

David Blank has already discussed TVA's MEREC program--Managing Energy and Resource Efficient Cities--so I won't go into it in detail. MEREC is a typical second-tier program. The program was designed in cooperation with USAID, which provides the funding.

Three cities were chosen initially to pilot the program--Tacloban, in the Philippines . . . Guarda, in Portugal . . . and Phuket, in Thailand. MEREC has recently expanded to 23 areas and is likely to add other cities soon.

The cities typically range in size from 40,000 to 100,000 people. TVA staff spend time in each city, talking to people who must deal directly with the city's problems.

So, unlike Steven Neuse's portrayal of a Lilienthal who spoke only to kings and presidents, TVA staff today truly work at the grassroots level to help people understand their problems.

Our staff then help those same people work through solutions that are appropriate for the level of sophistication and available resources that the people have to draw from.

TVA staff don't try to impose TVA solutions. Rather they try to help others find their own workable solutions, keeping the integrated resources management concept in the forefront.

Finally, TVA carries this integrated resources management concept down to the third tier--technology transfer. Here again, the idea is not to impose TVA solutions . . . but rather to help the people find solutions that are appropriate to their own needs.

Earlier I mentioned a TVA team that recently returned from Paraguay. They were on a typical third-tier mission. Periodically, the Paraguay River floods . . . and when it does, havoc reigns.

The Paraguayan government asked TVA to help them with flood forecasting. A few years earlier, the Paraguayans had asked another United States agency--which will remain nameless--for help.

That agency had recommended that Paraguay set up an elaborate, weather data collection system. This the Paraguayans did. They now had several years of data. Unfortunately, they didn't have a suitable computer to analyze the data. And even if they could analyze the data, they had no idea what to do with the resulting information.

So, when the TVA staff arrived on the scene, the Paraguayans saw them as saviors. I'm told that the Paraguayans hoped TVA would recommend a vast dam-building project on a mini-TVA scale . . . and would help Paraguay get the project off the ground.

The TVA staff, however, saw a problem unlike anything they had seen in the Tennessee Valley. To begin with, Paraguay is a flat country. I'm talking about pancake flat.

A dam that would even span the Paraguay River floodplain would be a dozen miles across. And the reservoir behind it still wouldn't be deep enough to hold a good-sized flood.

Secondly, the river was so large and moved so slowly that flood stage could last not a few days, but up to six months. Dams were definitely not the answer.

TVA recommended instead that the country develop a floodplain management plan. Such a plan would permit the land to be used when flood waters abated but would allow no permanent damage or disruption of lives when the river was in flood.

This, then, is TVA's three-tiered approach to international development issues. TVA serves as an educator, a regional development consultant, and a technology transfer agent. And whatever help TVA offers is solidly based in the principles of integrated resource management and appropriate technology.

At this point I should mention that occasionally TVA gets involved in international projects on such a scale that a long-term commitment is warranted. When that happens, TVA may cooperate in setting up an autonomous institute to deal with the issues.

A case in point is the International Fertilizer Development Center at Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Set up by TVA a decade ago, the IFDC researches fertilizers for the use of developing nations in tropical climates.

I've just given you a picture of how TVA conducts its international activities today. The picture for tomorrow will emerge from our current self-examination. Under the leadership of new Board Chairman Marvin Runyon, TVA is looking at all of its operations--from top to bottom.

Our international involvements will be scrutinized along with everything else . . . How well are we doing? What resources do we need? What benefits are we producing?

We've always seen technology transfer and working with others as part of the TVA mission. We anticipate these will remain. But this is a time for evaluation, and we can't at this point tell you what the results will be.

Stock-taking is good for an organization, and I have no doubt that it will help TVA become more productive in its own operations . . . and a more effective partner in the regional, national, and international activities in which it is involved.

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